

Culture is a collection of systems, institutions, and shared experiences (language, religion, food, art, music, education, values, political systems)

- “the cumulative deposit of knowledge, experience, beliefs, values, attitudes, meanings, hierarchies, religion, notions of time, roles, spatial relations, concepts of the universe, and material objects and possessions acquired by a group of people in the course of generations through individual and group striving” (via dismantlingracism.org from Larry A Samovar and Richard E. Porter 1994)
- "Culture gives meaning to reality. As such, culture has the power to compel behavior and the capacity to reinforce ideas and beliefs about human functioning, including issues of educational achievement and motivation. As such, culture is the invisible medium in which all human functioning occurs. It is important to note, in fact, that nothing human happens outside of culture." - [Dr. Wade W. Nobles, PhD](#)
- “I’ve come to think of culture this way: culture is to a group what personality is to an individual. It’s a collective character that describes a set of beliefs and behaviors that identify the group.” — Debby Irving, [Waking Up White: And Finding Myself in the Story of Race](#)

We learn culture through a process of socialization - which can be direct or indirect, but happens as a result of being in certain communities, in contact with institutions, a part of a family, etc.

- socialization: the process by which individuals acquire social skills, beliefs, values, and behaviors necessary to function effectively in society or in a particular group. - APA Dictionary of Psychology

In the US, the process of socialization influences the way we think, act, and behave. This can lead us toward thinking, acting, and behaving the same... and turning away from anyone that thinks, acts or behaves differently. Here’s what we call these “shared rules” that we learn through socialization...

- Cultural Norms or Expectations: behaviors, ideas, practices, beliefs etc, that are acceptable (or tend to be the majority) within a particular culture.

Three mainstream/dominant cultures we’re all swimming in / affected, impacted, infected with: white supremacy, patriarchy, capitalism

white supremacy

- The idea (ideology) that white people are biologically and socially superior to Black, Indigenous, and people of color, which has been metastasized into a system of laws, institutions, media, etc.

- Establishes people who are considered white and their ideas, beliefs, attitudes, practices, actions, etc. as default

patriarchy

- Upheld by the pillars of 1) gender binary 2) misogyny 3) cis-heterosexism 4) white supremacy 5) capitalism
- Establishes white cisgender heterosexual male as the default

capitalism

- an institutionalized social order, created and championed by male-identified people predominantly of European descent
- an institutionalized social order, in/of itself a system of oppression that is dependent on domination and has a perpetual tendency toward crisis. It rests on the background conditions of labor (predominantly unpaid labor from racialized people and women), nature, and money. Capitalism has unpaid bills due for carbon use and enslaved labor. (paraphrased definition from scholar Nancy Fraser)

I think whites are carefully taught not to recognize white privilege, as males are taught not to recognize male privilege. So I have begun in an un-tutored way to ask what it is like to have white privilege. I have come to see white privilege as an invisible package of unearned assets which I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was 'meant' to remain oblivious. White privilege is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools and blank checks.

I was taught to see racism only in individual acts of meanness, not in invisible systems conferring dominance on my group.

https://psychology.umbc.edu/files/2016/10/White-Privilege_McIntosh-1989.pdf

White Supremacy Definition: "The idea (ideology) that white people and the ideas, thoughts, beliefs, and actions of white people are superior to People of Color and their ideas, thoughts, beliefs, and actions. While most people associate white supremacy with extremist groups like the Ku Klux Klan and the neo-Nazis, white supremacy is ever present in our institutional and cultural assumptions that assign value, morality, goodness, and humanity to the white group while casting people and communities of color as worthless (worth less), immoral, bad, and inhuman and 'undeserving.' Drawing

from critical race theory, the term 'white supremacy' also refers to a political or socio-economic system where white people enjoy structural advantage and rights that other racial and ethnic groups do not, both at a collective and an individual level."

<https://www.racialequitytools.org/glossary>

Culture reflects the beliefs, values, norms, and standards of a group, a community, a town, a state, a nation. White supremacy culture is the widespread ideology baked into the beliefs, values, norms, and standards of our groups (many if not most of them), our communities, our towns, our states, our nation, teaching us both overtly and covertly that whiteness holds value, whiteness is value. It teaches us that Blackness is not only valueless but also dangerous and threatening. It teaches us that Indigenous people and communities no longer exist, or if they do, they are to be exoticized and romanticized or culturally appropriated as we continue to violate treaties, land rights, and humanity. It teaches us that people south of the border are "illegal." It teaches us that Arabs are Muslim and that Muslim is "terrorist." It teaches us that people of Chinese and Japanese descent are both indistinguishable and threatening as the reason for Covid. It pits other races and racial groups against each other while always defining them as inferior to the white group.

...

As early settlers came to what would become the U.S. from Europe, those in leadership were male and Christian. They did not identify as white. They identified with their ethnic, national, and/or religious roots - they were English, French, Dutch and they were Protestant, Catholic, Puritan. They came with the desire to create a "new world" where they could profit and prosper. But once here, they faced a big problem. These ruling class elite and their families were outnumbered by the Indigenous people whose lives and land they were stealing and the Africans who they forcibly kidnapped for enslavement and forced labor.

Because the ruling class elite were outnumbered, they had to persuade newly arriving immigrants from Europe to cast aside their ethnic, national, and/or religious differences into a solidarity that could meet the challenge. And so they created the category of "white" and whiteness and consolidated the idea of white supremacy as a way to organize these very different immigrants into a singular and unifying racial category. They did this by requiring them to disconnect from their ethnic and national identities in order to gain access to the material, emotional, physical, intellectual, and spiritual benefits of a whiteness designed specifically and intentionally to pit them against and place them above Indigenous and enslaved peoples.

They wed racism, and I use the word "wed" purposefully, to the construction of race; they created racism as white supremacy's tool.

Their goal was and is to undermine communal solidarity (thank you [Paul Kivel](#)). Their goal was and is to create a hegemonic Christian society (see box on the right) based on white supremacy ideology.

Throughout this website, when I use the term white supremacy, I am referring to the ways in which these ruling class elite or the power elite in the colonies of what was to become the United States used the pseudo-scientific concept of race to create whiteness and a hierarchy of racialized value in order to

- disconnect and divide white people from Black, Indigenous, and People of Color ([BIPOC](#));
- disconnect and divide Black, Indigenous, and People of Color from each other;
- disconnect and divide white people from other white people;
- disconnect and divide each and all of us from the earth, the sun, the wind, the water, the stars, the animals that roam(ed) the earth;
- disconnect and divide each of us from ourselves and from source (see below).

The power elite constructed white supremacy (and construct it still) to define who is fully human and who is not. <https://www.whitesupremacyculture.info/what-is-it.html>

White Supremacy Culture Characteristics - Still Here

- **Fear (the soil)**

- **Perfectionism**
- **One Right Way**
- **Paternalism**
- **Objectivity**

- **Either/Or (binary) thinking**

- **Progress is Bigger/More**
- **Quantity over Quality**

- **Worship of the Written Word**

- **Individualism**
- **I'm the Only One**

- **Defensiveness**
- **Denial**

- **Right to Comfort**
- **Fear of Conflict**
- **Power Hoarding**

- **Constant state of urgency**
- **"Qualified"**

- **Fear (the soil)**

White supremacy, white supremacy culture, and racism use fear to divide and conquer, always in the service of profit and power for a few at the expense of the many. White supremacy culture cultivates our fear of not belonging, of not being enough. Living in fear that we are not enough, white supremacy culture teaches us to fear others (or hate others) in an attempt, sometimes overt, sometimes unspoken, to prove to ourselves that we are ok. An easy way to prove we are ok is to point the finger at all those who are not. An easy way to belong to each other is to hate and fear all the others who do not

- **Perfectionism**
- **One Right Way**
- **Paternalism**
- **Objectivity**

There is no relationship between perfectionism and excellence. Perfectionism is the belief that we can be perfect or perform perfectly. The question has to be asked: according to who? Who decides what perfect is?

...

White supremacy culture uses perfectionism to preserve power and the status quo. As long as we are striving to be perfect according to someone else's rules, we have less energy and attention to question those rules and to remember what is truly important.

- **Either/Or (binary) thinking**

This characteristic explores our cultural assumption that we can and should reduce the complexity of life and the nuances of our relationships with each other and all living things into either/or, yes or no, right or wrong in ways that reinforce toxic power.

- **Progress is Bigger/More**
- **Quantity over Quality**

These characteristics explore our cultural assumption that the goal is always to be/do/get more and be/do/get bigger. This leads to an emphasis on what we can "objectively" measure - how well we are doing at being/doing/getting more - as more valuable than the quality of our relationships to all living beings.

- **Worship of the Written Word**

This characteristic explores our cultural habit of honoring only what is written and only what is written to a narrow standard, even when what is written is full of misinformation and lies. Worship of the written word includes erasure of the wide range of ways we communicate with each other and all living things.

- **Individualism**
- **I'm the Only One**

These characteristics look at our cultural assumption that individualism is our cultural story - that we make it on our own (or should), without help, while pulling ourselves up by our own bootstraps. Our cultural attachment to individualism leads to a toxic denial of our essential interdependence and the reality that we are all in this, literally, together.

- **Defensiveness**
- **Denial**

Defensiveness and denial reflect our cultural dis-ease with truth telling, particularly when we are speaking truth to power. White supremacy culture encourages a habit of denying and defending any speaking to or about it

- **Right to Comfort**
- **Fear of Conflict**
- **Power Hoarding**

These characteristics focus on our cultural assumption that I or we (or the ones in formal and informal power) have a right to comfort, which means we cannot tolerate conflict, particularly open conflict. This assumption supports the tendency to blame the person or group causing discomfort or conflict rather than addressing the issues being named.

- **Constant state of urgency**

A constant sense of urgency reflects our cultural habit of applying a sense of urgency to our every-day lives in ways that perpetuate power imbalance while disconnecting us from our need to breathe and pause and reflect. The irony is that this imposed sense of urgency serves to erase the actual urgency of tackling racial and social injustice.

- **“Qualified”**

This particular characteristic is internalized primarily by middle and owning class white people, formally educated, who are taught by the culture that they (in this case referring to people like me who live in these identities) are qualified and even duty bound to fix, save, and set straight the world (thank you Parker Palmer). Closely aligned with dominant mainstream Christian ideology that teaches a Christian duty to convert the "heathen," the "savage," the "impure," this characteristic is particularly violent both psychically and physically in its determination to ignore and/or erase the culture, wisdom, genius, joy of people and communities being "saved" while seizing their land, labor, architecture, music, food, and other material goods to commodify for profit.

I want to stress that while the intention to fix, save, and set straight is often overt, the deviousness of this characteristic is how strongly white middle and owning class educated people can internalize and assume their own inherent qualifications to "improve" whatever is in front of them that is "broken" without acknowledging or seeing their role in breaking it. This internalized assumption becomes an unnamed way of being, a conditioned impulse to "help" others out of a what feels like a benign sense that they know the right way, the best way with little or no understanding of how limited they really are.

Examples of this characteristic are all around us. Academia defines "the classics" as all things Roman and Greek and male, while the word "classic" means that which is judged over a period of time to be of the highest quality and outstanding. And so with the simple use of a word to describe a body of work, a whole category of knowledge assigns superiority to a very limited body of knowing and being, consigning other ways of knowing and being as "less than" while rarely recognizing other cultural and community-based ways of knowing at all.